HUMAN RESOURCES

Roberts, Michael. *The Estate of Man.* London, 1951. Faber & Faber. Pp. 156. Price 15s.

THE " Estate " in Roberts' meaning is the soil, the world's mineral wealth and man himself, his numbers and his quality. One feels as one reads this intelligent book, which the author did not live to finish, that he was a little surprised at himself for not having written it before ; there is a note of urgency (indeed the subject would naturally produce this) and we get occasional undertones of the very personal sentiment that he, a teacher and a lover of poetry, would have liked to humanize the statistics with. " After all, haven't I got to live ? " someone asked Voltaire, who answered : " *Mais je n'en vois point la necessité !* " What we, with Roberts, find unnecessary is that as many people as possible should be born into the world to exploit the soil and use up the coal with the utmost speed in a convulsive effort to hasten the Day of Nemesis.

A merit of this book is that it attempts a synthesis of the main aspects of the population-and-resources problem. Most people in buses and tubes are the long-suffering victims of a situation they are probably too busy, and often too modest, to try to understand ; vaguely they know something has been done about erosion somewhere, and that it is estimated that our coal stocks are going to last 1,000—or is it only 100 years ? After that they suppose atomic energy will see us through. They mostly think (in this country) that the Pope is going a bit far when he makes pronouncements about what doctors are to do in awkward cases of childbirth. . . . Vastly larger numbers of people are more uncomfortable victims of the same situation in other parts of the world. For English readers, anyhow, this is a good text-book. It will be disappointing if rather more elementary books like it do not proliferate and become standard in schools everywhere.

Chapter VI—" How Much Will Our Nerves Stand ? "—was admirably conceived. This should link up, in a sound course of demographic studies, with the question of the psychological types and temperaments on whose numerical ratio to one another a good deal may be thought to depend, and the more so the more that Selection among mankind becomes less Natural. " We need to decide," says Roberts, " what kind of life we want before we decide the number of telephones and people . . ."—and here is our link with religion and philosophy. Chapter VII, " The Struggle For Power," is interesting but in parts unclarified. It is a wise observation that " subjects such as physics and chemistry are so much simpler than the art of government, and yet so successful in their own field, that the physicist and the chemist is nearly always certain that he could rule the country better than the government of the day." The analysis of the Capital *v.* Labour antithesis is excellent ; the inferences are a little pessimistic perhaps. Roberts will have had small encouragement from economists to put any faith in a redistribution of populations—in migration policies to be pursued alongside of measures to preserve soil, make the best use of coal and (if one may say it in the same breath) to improve our human kind by various means open to us. Economists have not always been right in their predictions. The truth is that the feudal architecture of society was not at all bad *on plan*, in spite of the faulty elevation. Urban masses are chiefly made up of absentee landlords, yeomen and peasants, and probably more of them ought to consider going back to that rural part of the " Estate " that can now be sufficiently modernized to make both work and leisure palatable there.

PAUL BLOOMFIELD.

* * *

This slight, pleasantly produced book attempts a survey of the whole range of human resources from food and energy through " talent " to " nerves " and ends with a chapter on "The struggle for power". The author died in 1948, and the notes for two additional chapters, on war and the future respectively, are printed in an appendix. The argument is supported by

twenty-two tables and a bibliography. Some of the figures and other data have been brought up to date by Mrs. Roberts, who has edited the volume for publication.

The opening is well written and sober in style, and though the material resembles that of the hysterical outbursts of some United States writers, we are encouraged to hope that here at last is a balanced treatment of the problems of human resources.

This hope is disappointed. On the subject of the reservoir of talent, for instance, the view that "intelligence" is an inherited quality, that it is measured by intelligence tests and that it is declining owing to the differential birth-rate, is put forward uncritically. Even if these propositions were true, it would be necessary to make some mention of the arguments against them. As readers of this journal (but not all possible readers of Mr. Roberts' book) know well, there is no general agreement on the significance of intelligence tests; and—as Professor Penrose has pointed out in these columns—there are theoretical reasons for doubting whether the variation in fertility between different groups does actually have the effect on the national talent attributed to it. Above all, we have the recent inquiries in England and Scotland which show that there has been a *rise* in mean IQ during the past two decades. *The Estate of Man* neglects the whole controversy.

While there is some doubt whether the "problem of loss of talent" exists at all, there can be no doubt that large numbers of people are short of food. Mr. Roberts tells the familiar story of increasing populations and stationary or declining resources, and concludes, "There is, indeed, no answer." The publication of *The Estate of Man* almost coincided with the appearance in *Nature* of a first announcement of research on a wholly new method of manufacturing food. At present all our food production is based on principles known to the first farmers some ten thousand years ago. Scientific method has hardly been applied to transforming agriculture, as industry has been transformed in the past two hundred years. A book on resources which neglects this fact, and fails to mention the giant schemes proposed for various parts of the world from the Amazon to the Volga, is inevitably misleading.

This bias appears on every topic. "Man exterminates one kind of pest which has robbed his orchards or his barns from the beginning of history, and finds that some other pest, long kept in check by the first, now flourishes and cannot be destroyed until the old pest is re-introduced." This is quite simply not true: what "other pests" are kept in check by, for instance, locusts or rats?

Mr. Roberts had no confidence in his fellow men and little hope for the future: short of food, raw materials and intelligence, we have, he believed, "enough damsilliness to last for ever." What he failed to discern was just where the damsilliness lay.

S. A. B.

MARRIAGE

Walker, Kenneth. *Marriage.* London, 1951. Secker & Warburg. Pp. 136. Price 8s. 6d.

PROFESSOR CREW in his foreword to this book says of Mr. Walker, "he is a good man, compassionate, loving his fellow men, wishful to help." These qualities shine through this book as much as the author's great wisdom, the fruit of his long life as an eminent surgeon and as "a scientist seeking a philosophy."

Mr. Walker has already written several important books on sex, but in this one he aims "to impart just that kind of knowledge which, in the author's experience, is usually required by those who seek personal advice on the eve of their marriage." It was written for the British Social Biology Council, but on the more controversial questions it expresses the author's personal views.

A subtle yet clear description and discussion of the sexual side of marriage forms the major part of the book, but later chapters stress the many other aspects of the creative task of marriage and touch on the main